

Former candy factory gets set to let small chefs bust out of their home kitchens

Licensed and fully kitted out, co-cooking space Make Eat wants to make artisanal food producers' dreams come true

By JESSICA STEINBERG | 27 July 2019, 12:21 pm



Michal Klimberg (left) and Shir Halperin partnered together to create Make Eat, a shared cooking space for small-scale food manufacturers (Afik Gabay)

When home chefs attempt to market their artisanal jams, breads or cookies, they often face daunting obstacles in the form of stringent health regulations and small-scale home kitchens.

It's a recurring problem that food entrepreneur Shir Halpern faced frequently at the Tel Aviv Port Market, an indoor (and outdoor on Friday) food market she owns with partner Michal Ansky along with three other markets in Givatayim, Reut and Shoham.

"What happened a lot is that there would be a baker baking from home who would sell in my market but couldn't expand from the confines of that home kitchen," said Halpern. "Or she would try to expand, but the Health Ministry regulations weren't appropriate for a small-scale business."

Halpern is now attempting to make those obstacles go away with [Make Eat](#), a factory and workspace for food makers that she is establishing with another partner, Michal Klimberg.

The initiative, which aims to help small food manufacturers grow their businesses, will be based out of the former Carmit candy plant in Rishon Lezion, part of Klimberg's family business.

"I kept seeing small-scale producers — they could be pastry makers or bread bakers or making candy, but they didn't succeed in growing," said Halpern, who was introduced to farmers markets in Washington, DC, where she worked as a Cordon Bleu-trained chef at a Michelin-starred restaurant. "Sometimes it was because of health regulations, or branding or quality, but I was always losing small businesses."

She's hoping to change all that with this latest venture.

The 10,000-square-meter (107,639 feet) space of [Make Eat](#) will have 40 separate fully equipped kitchens and a food manufacturing license from the Health Ministry. At the start, which is slated for January 2020, the food factory will host bakers, dairy caterers and pastry makers, but no meat, fish and cheese makers.



Michal Klimberg (Afik Gabay)



One of the architectural renderings for Make Eat, the new food factory planned for small-scale food producers (Courtesy Make Eat)

Make Eat will build appropriate kitchen spaces for each food maker, who can rent space for as much time as needed. The organization will eventually offer branding and development guidance as well.

“There’s lots of possibility in the space,” said Klimberg. “There’s 10,000 meters and we’re just starting with a corner of it.”

It’s pretty much a small-scale food maker’s dream come true.

Halpern and Klimberg were surprised by the range of interested candidates, including restaurants looking for prep kitchens, bakers and pastry makers, many of them citing issues with health permits.

What they plan to offer is a modern takeoff on a business model used by Klimberg’s father Lenny Sackstein, a South African immigrant who established private label candy manufacturer Carmit Candy Industries Ltd. in the 1980s as an extension of a growing business that he opened with two other immigrants, from France and the US. They originally called it Taste of Israel and sold packaged chocolates made in their small plant.

“There was nothing culinary about it,” said Klimberg. “They knew nothing. The quality wasn’t great.”



The exterior of Carmit, the private label candy factory that will be remade as Make Eat, a food factory (Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

The business grew, and when they needed more space, they took a plot of land at what was then the edge of Rishon Lezion, a city just outside Tel Aviv. They needed around 4,000 square meters but took 12,000, subletting the extra space to other food manufacturers. Their renters included Burger Ranch and ice cream maker Dr. Lek; the ice cream maker is still part of their extended plant to this day.

Carmit became a public company with NIS 150 million annual turnover. With an additional manufacturing plant up north, the company decided several years ago to leave its Rishon location.

Klimberg, the director of the company since 2000, wanted to do something with the spacious factory there — now located in the very heart of Rishon's sprawling industrial area, right off the Ayalon highway that leads into Tel Aviv.

"I wanted to take the idea of food manufacturing and update it to the world today. I wanted a WeWork for the food industry," she said.

Both Klimberg and Halpern frequently refer to WeWork, the worldwide workspace-sharing company that has created a solution for small startups, freelancers and other remote staff. But WeWork, said Klimberg, "is a plug-and-play" solution.

"Here, we needed to understand who are the manufacturers so that we could set up the factory correctly," she said. "We needed to know if there were more pastry makers than bakers or vice versa. We're going to open our doors and if we get it wrong, then we won't be able to cater to the right people."

Two years of research, including an extensive trip with their architect to the US to explore similar concepts, went into the plan they designed for Make Eat.

"We saw all kinds of food incubators in the US," said Halpern. "Some were more philanthropic, others were more high-tech — they were all over the place."

Gradually, they narrowed their idea to the current plan, which is a kind of maker's space for small-scale food manufacturers.

"They're 'making eat,' but we really want them to 'make it,' said Halpern.

The bakers, pastry makers, caterers and food manufacturers who will work out of Make Eat need to have a clear idea of what they want to manufacture, said Klimberg. With their Health Ministry certification, they can "only make what they're allowed to make," she said.

"It's easier to set that up," she added. "They'll learn how to operate with the factory, and they'll have a full and specific package. The idea is to save people from having to invest in machinery and not deal with that headache until



Shir Halperin (Afik Gabay)

they know what they want to make.”

There may be 40 people working at a time at Make Eat, with day and night shifts. Bakers, for example, often work through the wee hours.

When Halpern and Klimberg first opened the website and registration for Make Eat several weeks ago, they were flooded with requests from more than 100 small-scale food manufacturers.

“It brings me back to the beginning of the market,” said Halpern. “It’s a boat that you don’t know how it will work. The shuk wasn’t good for all farmers and Make Eat won’t be right for everyone. That’s why we’re sitting with each of the potential candidates to see what they need too.”

Many of those applicants tell Halpern that Make Eat is offering them the chance to fulfill their dreams, and she wants to do that.

“We have the potential to bring out people who are working in their houses and offer them the right kind of supervision,” she said. “Make Eat is something that takes us back to the homemade, cottage industries but also pulls from the world of shared spaces.”

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